

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION
CRAB MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MAY 17, 2004 - 6:00 PM

Draft Minutes

MEMBERS PRESENT

Hon. Lake Cowart, Jr.
Wayne Abbott
Rob Brumbaugh
John Graham
Jim Casey
Tom Powers
Pete Freeman

STAFF PRESENT

Jack Travelstead
Rob O'Reilly
Roy Insley
Ellen Cosby
Lewis Jones

MEMBERS ABSENT

Peter Nixon
Marshall Cox
Jeff Crockett
Eddie Crockett
Louis Whittaker
William E. Abbott
Woody Zember
Ronnie Jett
Paige Hogge
Wade Harding
Lee Scarborough
Billy Moore
Lesney Miller
James Ashburn Sr.

I. Introductions, Announcements

The meeting was called to order at 6:15 PM by Jack Travelstead. Lake Cowart arrived to chair the meeting after the minutes were approved.

II. Approval of minutes

Rob Brumbaugh asked that a sentence to be added for clarification in New Business, Section A. The minutes of March 2, 2004 were approved as amended.

III. Old Business

A. Continued discussion of options for sponge crab prohibitions

Mr. Travelstead reminded members of their previous discussion on the lifting of the prohibition on harvesting brown to black sponge crabs and informed them that the Commission was interested in them looking further into it. Is there a compromise that can be worked out? There is some opposition from the Northern Neck area, because they are happy with the status quo or would like to see a total sponge ban. The current legislation does discriminate against the lower Bay crabbers, so we need to spread the

burden around geographically. Does anyone have any solutions or better justifications?

Rob O'Reilly informed members that this regulation had been in place since 1996, which was prior to the harvest reduction measures, so it is outside that process. A handout entitled "A Comparison of Management Measures, Relative to Contributions to the Spawning Potential of Blue Crab" was distributed to the committee. Mr. O'Reilly pointed out that with the current regulation of no possession of late-stage sponge crabs throughout the season, an estimated 1.5 million sponge crabs were saved. Estimated savings of sponge crabs were revealed for 1-week, 2-week, 3-week and 8-week bans. The 8-week ban was the closest to what we have now, with a savings of 1.3 million crabs.

Dr. Rom Lipcius (VIMS) stated that he was concerned about handling mortality. During the last two weeks in August and the first two weeks in September, the sponge crabs need more protection. The current spawning sanctuary provides some protection because there is no handling stress and no harvest. Results of a two-year tagging study indicated an eight-fold handling mortality level. We need to re-examine the sponge crab ban, but not just for one week; four weeks is good, but not acceptable to industry. The most recent dredge survey showed an increase in the number of crabs in Virginia and a decrease in Maryland, so a shift in distribution happened.

Pete Freeman commented that in his experience, the period of July 5 - 25 is the most abundant sponge crab run and that there is a minor run in August. He noted that crabs go offshore after July.

Rob Brumbaugh asked if handling mortality isn't still an issue? Crabbing will still continue. We don't want to amplify crabbing in other areas or handling mortality.

Tom Powers asked won't crabbing just be displaced?

Mr. Travelstead responded by asking for alternatives.

Dr. Lipcius suggested that we extend the sanctuary north and create a narrow migration corridor (in deep water) in May and August through October. He stated that he would like to get Maryland to participate to protect the females. He said a corridor would be more effective if Maryland would participate.

Mr. Powers identified defacto closed areas around Virginia Beach, and asked if we could add them to the sanctuary (Cape Henry to the Carolina line). Dr. Lipcius said it would be an equitability issue. Mr. Brumbaugh expressed his support for the extension south.

Dr. Lipcius explained about sponge mortality and crab survival. He suggested that he could try to measure handling mortality with VMRC staff.

John Graham expressed concern with the mortality of sponge. He said that often the crabbers will save black sponge crabs until they determine if a Marine Patrol Officer is

available. If an officer is available, then they return them to the water dead or injured.

Jim Casey questioned the proportion of late-stage sponge in the hand-out. He felt the theory of calculating standing stock sponge crabs was flawed.

Lake Cowart asked what would the economic impact of change be? It would be a good idea for VIMS and VMRC to determine the mortality of sponge with handling this season.

Mr. Casey noted that when crabs are too ripe they stink, even when you cook them, so there is no market for them.

Mr. Powers stated that we also need to determine the percentage of crabs thrown back.

The general consensus of the members present was to go with the studies.

Mr. Cowart asked if there was funding available for this? Dr. Lipcius responded that he figured VMRC staff would do the field work and VIMS would analyze it.

B. Continued discussion of crab license transfer procedures

Mr. Travelstead reminded members how the crab license transfer process worked and noted that there were a lot of issues with the sale of a boat.

Mr. Cowart related that one of the local guys in his area wanted to transfer a peeler pot license and had problems with the boat requirement. We need to design ways to get around it. It's time to look at the regulation as an adequate means to control effort.

Mr. Powers commented that if an inactive license was transferred to a person who would use it, then it would lead to more effort. We heard reports of situations where a wife and kids all have licenses and use husband/dad as agent or can sell a license. Mr. Powers said he was in favor of having a person give up their CRFL also, if selling a crab license. He said he was not against the concept of license transfer, but did not want to increase effort.

Mr. Graham said you can't deny an old guy who is retiring, the right to sell his crab license.

Mr. Cowart asked members if we should continue to require that a boat go with a transfer?

Wayne Abbott said he doesn't see where this is a problem, since most watermen are at the age of retirement or disabled.

Mr. Brumbaugh stated that this was initially put in place to cap effort. He expressed concerns about latent effort, and asked if we can attach an activity level requirement prior

to the transfer with a harvest requirement. Mr. Casey added that we could base it on the number of days.

Mr. Travelstead replied that staff will bring graphs of different options back to the committee.

IV. New Business

A. Exceptions to the 8-hour work day, medical disability

Mr. Travelstead stated that we need to verify a disability with a doctor's note.

Lt. Col. Lewis Jones commented that by definition, a disabled person is not gainfully employed. You need to look at qualifying criteria. VGIF has accommodations for disabled persons to allow them to enjoy hunting.

Mr. Casey made a motion to leave it as is, because agent usage is designed to take care of hardships. The vote was unanimous (one abstention).

B. Other items

Mr. Freeman explained that there is a problem with VMRC's Mandatory Reporting Program not getting all of the crab harvest; many are selling to trucks. He noted that the PRFC used a record book on each boat.

Roy Insley responded that VMRC conducted investigations last year and found fairly accurate reporting with only a few minor problems. Also, he said he had people investigating this year's complaints about crabs being sold on a "black market" without harvest reports coming in to VMRC statistics section.

V. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting was scheduled for the third Monday in June (June 21) at 6:00 pm.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 pm.